



What's up with Fad Diets? Are there any good fad diets?

Fad diets have been around a long time. In the 1860s, London undertaker William Banting was unable to lose weight until he eliminated sugar, starch, root vegetables and pork from his diet. His success in shedding pounds prompted him to promote a low-carbohydrate, high-protein style of consumption. "Banting" became a weight-loss strategy across the Atlantic in America, and his best-selling book *Letter on Corpulence* opened the floodgates to diet mass-marketing. (1) This created a new business of writing fad diet books from "The Chew-Chew diet" to "The Sonoma Diet". According to Dr. Carson of Academy Medical Systems, Inc., there are over 18,000 diet books listed in the Library of Congress. Unfortunately (fortunately for me), I will not be reviewing all of them, but I'll give you my "two cents" and several cents from other health professionals about a few of the more popular diets.

First, the goal of a diet should be *fat* loss. *Weight* loss is often times the term used, but is not accurate because weight can consist of muscle, bone, fluid and fat. So let's think fat loss. Second, let's think about the term body composition improvement. Simply stated, the goal of body composition improvement is to better the makeup of the body by decreasing body fat and maintaining or increasing muscle. This improvement in body composition has been shown to improve overall health (reduction in blood pressure & LDL cholesterol, blood sugar improvements, etc.) plus improved performance, especially for Active Duty. Third, the goal of a diet should be to provide optimum nutrients for the body while the body is in a calorie deficit. This diet should be able to eventually become a maintenance diet, meaning you lost the fat you needed to, now you're eating an appropriate amount of calories for your size and activity level.

So now that we know what our goal should be, what diets will get us there? The answer is, almost anyone that you stick to, within reason. Not all diets will provide optimum nutrients, but in one of the largest and longest research studies attempted on four popular diets, two included moderate compositions, Weight Watchers and The Zone, and two were extreme, Atkins (very low carbohydrate) and Ornish (very low fat). In these diets, weight loss was identical and individuals lost on average 15-20 pounds in one year. (2) That's average. So, some lost more and some lost less. The most important point to realize from this study was the drop out rate. 75 percent of people dropped out of the study and the drop out rates were much higher in the extreme diets, Atkins and Ornish. I would also go a step further in my own analysis and say that the Atkins diet, without resistance training, will decrease a lot of muscle and water plus prevent optimum performance for Active Duty. Carbohydrates, like bread, cereal and



pasta, soak up water like a kitchen sponge, unlike, protein and fat like meat and cheese or butter and oil. This lack of water retention will show weight loss on a scale, but not necessarily fat loss. The Atkins diet can also be void of a lot of healthful nutrients from whole grains.

Another fad diet that successfully reached the masses includes Eat Right 4 Your Blood Type. This book claims that your blood type determines your diet, supplements, and is the key to your body's immune system. Interestingly, each blood type (O, A, B, AB) is recommended to eat plenty of fruit, vegetables, and seafood. Isn't this what every health care professional recommends? The book also suggests chronically ill patients to eat the following diets instead of their treatment for cancer, asthma, infections, diabetes, arthritis, hypertension, and infertility. According to Nutrition Action Newsletter, this book also claims that a blood Type A female with a family history of breast cancer should introduce snails into her diet. I'll let that sink in while I begin to cover the next book. Although the diets may not be unhealthy and are actually healthy, there is no science to back up the claims.

The South Beach Diet is a die-hard and for good reason. It is actually based on some solid research. It's been viewed as the modified Atkins diet and the suggestion is to "eat the right carbohydrates instead of the wrong ones". (2) This will help to reduce cravings, improve insulin resistance (improve blood sugars) and hopefully cause weight loss. Overall this diet suggests healthy foods. The only downfall is its mild attack on carrots, bananas, pineapples, and watermelon. All are very healthy foods and should not be eliminated or even limited. Although this meal plan is healthy, this program may fall short on weight loss because it doesn't necessarily decrease calories. It is still possible to over-eat healthy foods and never lose weight. As far as a healthy fad diet, The South Beach Diet gets a two thumbs up.

The bottom line with fad diets is, extreme changes are not the answer and you need to choose a healthy weight loss plan that you are going to stick to for the long haul. Extreme behavior often ends up in extreme results. Extreme results are not always healthy. For example, "over-exercising" could lead to injury, over eating carbohydrates could lead to diseases such as obesity and diabetes, over consuming of saturated fat could lead to obesity and heart disease and over consumption of protein could lead to obesity and kidney disease. Sound like a "catch-22"? It isn't. Think moderately and make small changes. For weight loss, decrease your portion size. If you eat three now, cut down to two. Add a piece of fruit and some vegetables. Try bringing your lunch from home. Try to limit your "bad" carbohydrates like sweet tea, regular soda, candy, and chips. According to the National Weight Control Registry, <http://www.nwcr.ws/>, individuals who have lost a minimum of 30 pounds and kept it off for five years, chose a moderately low fat diet and walked for 60-90 minutes every day to lose the weight



and walk about 60 minutes daily to keep it off. Add resistance training two or three days a week to your healthful low fat diet and you too could be well on your way to a long and healthy life.

1. http://www.active.com/story.cfm?story_id=10574&sidebar=573&category=eat_right
2. Nutrition Action Health Letter. Center for Science in the Public Interest. July/August 2006.

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